

DEMOCRACY RESTORATION ACT
OF 2009

HON. JOHN CONYERS, JR.

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 24, 2009

Mr. CONYERS. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to introduce the Democracy Restoration Act of 2009. This legislation will serve to clarify and expand voting rights, as well as assist former felons with their reintegration into our democracy.

The Sentencing Project reports that, since 1997, 19 states have amended felony disenfranchisement policies in an effort to reduce their restrictiveness and expand voter eligibility. These reforms have resulted in more than 760,00 citizens regaining their voting rights. Yet, despite these reforms, an estimated 5 million people continue to be ineligible to vote in Federal elections, including nearly 4 million who reside in the 35 states that still prohibit some combination of persons on probation, parole, and/or people who have completed their sentence from voting.

I believe that there are three grave discrepancies in State laws regarding felony convictions that lead to unfairness in Federal elections. First, there is no uniform standard for voting in Federal elections, which leads to an egregious disparity and unequal participation in Federal elections based solely on where a person lives. Second, laws governing the restoration of voting rights after a felony conviction are unequal throughout the country and persons in some States can easily regain their voting rights while in other States persons effectively lose their right to vote permanently. Third, State disenfranchisement laws disproportionately impact ethnic minorities, thus adversely infringing upon citizens of these communities constitutional right to vote.

These concerns about ex-offender disenfranchisement are not rhetorical. In the past two election cycles, flawed voter purges have deprived thousands of legitimate voters of their rights. For example, an erroneous interpretation of state law by the Ohio Secretary of State deprived thousands of ex-felons in that state of even the right to register. Only Federal law can conclusively resolve the ambiguities in this area plaguing our voting system.

Like the States, Congress has recognized the need to address the barriers to full citizenship faced by ex-offenders. Last Congress, President Bush signed the Second Chance Act into law, signaling a greater awareness of the need to implement policies to aid the reintegration of our ex-felon community. This voting legislation is the next step in restoring the ex-felon community to full citizenship. Denying voting rights to ex-offenders robs them of the opportunity to fully participate and contribute to their society. Disenfranchisement laws isolate and alienate ex-offenders, and have been shown to serve as one more obstacle in their attempt to successfully reintegrate into society. Moreover, these obstacles adversely impact the voting participation of their families, further undermining the effectiveness of our voting system.

This legislation is a narrowly crafted effort to expand voting rights for ex-felons, while protecting State prerogatives to generally establish voting qualifications. This legislation would only apply to persons who have been released

from prison, and it would only apply to Federal elections. Consequently, the bill is fully consistent with Constitutional requirements established by the Supreme Court in a series of decisions upholding Federal voting rights laws.

In past Congresses, voting restoration legislation has been supported by a broad coalition of groups interested in voting and civil rights, including the NAACP, ACLU, the National Council of Churches (National and Washington Office), the National Urban League, the Human Rights Watch and the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, among many others.

The practice of many states denying voting rights to former felons represents a vestige from a time when suffrage was denied to whole classes of our population based on race, gender, religion, national origin, and property. Ex-felons who have been lawfully released from prisons have paid their debts to society. To continue denying them the ability to reclaim rights as citizens resurrects historic unenlightened practices of our society. Ultimately, I believe that we fail not only ex-offenders by denying them the right to vote, but the rest of a society that has struggled throughout its history to be legitimate and inclusive. Just like poll taxes and literacy tests, it is long past time that these restrictions be relegated to unenlightened history.

EARMARK DECLARATION

HON. AARON SCHOCK

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 24, 2009

Mr. SCHOCK. Madam Speaker, in accordance with the Republican adopted standards on earmarks, I submit the below detailed explanation of the Oak Ridge Cemetery Infrastructure Improvements, Springfield, Illinois.

Bill Number: H.R. 3288, Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2010

Provisions/Account: Department of Housing and Urban Development, Economic Development Initiatives

Name and Address of Requesting Entity: The entity to receive funding for this project is the City of Springfield and Oak Ridge Cemetery, located at 1440 Monument Avenue, Springfield, IL, 62702.

Description of Request: Oak Ridge Cemetery is the largest cemetery in Illinois, the resting place of President Abraham Lincoln and is the nation's second most visited cemetery with up to 40,000 visitors a day using private vehicles and mass transit buses. The roads used were paved and guttered over 100 years ago and now are in dire need of resurfacing. Oak Ridge Cemetery is self supporting and typically requires no tax dollars from the federal, state, or local level. In a typical year, Oak Ridge receives over 3 million visitors; however, with the Lincoln Bicentennial this year, visitation is expected to have a large increase.

CONGRATULATING LITHUANIA ON
1,000TH ANNIVERSARY

SPEECH OF

HON. SHEILA JACKSON-LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 22, 2009

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking Congressman JOHN SHIMKUS, for introducing this legislation. I would like to congratulate the people of the Republic of Lithuania on the 1000th anniversary of Lithuania. Lithuania, a full and responsible member of the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, has proved resilient in overcoming many obstacles and has achieved many great accomplishments: Lithuania founded Vilnius University in 1579; in 1990, the Republic of Lithuania was restored and Lithuania became the first Soviet republic to declare independence; in 1918, Act of Independence of Lithuania led to the establishment of Lithuania as a sovereign and democratic state; in 2007, the United States Government and the Government of Lithuania celebrated 85 years of continuous diplomatic relations.

I commend Lithuania for successfully developing into a free and democratic country, with a free market economy and respect for and adherence to a rule of law. The U.S. welcomes and appreciates efforts by the Government of Lithuania to maintain international peace and stability in Europe and around the world by contributing to international civilian and military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Georgia. Since 2005, Lithuania has been leading a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) of Ghor Province in Afghanistan. They have worked to help Afghanistan become a secure, democratic and self-sufficient state. Lithuania has been dedicated to the success of the UN-mandated ISAF operation and to working with the international community in Afghanistan motivates our involvement.

The vast Lithuanian community in the United States has preserved its spiritual, cultural and family ties with their historical motherland during the long years of living overseas, which translated into active cultural and business cooperation between Lithuania and the United States. The activities of Lithuanian Americans have greatly contributed to the restoration of Lithuania's independence and to the membership of Lithuania in NATO. Today their active participation greatly adds to the promotion of Lithuania's foreign policy goals and the strengthening of cooperation between Lithuania and the U.S. As a senior member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I recognize firsthand the importance of Lithuania's global foreign policy efforts, and they are to be commended.

The Lithuanian American Community, Inc., (LAC) is the network that keeps Lithuanians connected in the U.S. They have 60 chapters in 27 states and the District of Columbia. The Houston, Texas chapter is an active and vibrant group, and they remain engaged in the community and strive to educate their fellow Houstonians on the rich culture of Lithuania. Lithuanian American community maintains regular contacts with the Lithuanian Embassy and other Lithuanian Government institutions.